The Effects of Shona Language Change on Monolingual Lexicography: The Need for a Revised Alphabet

William Zivenge, *Department of African Languages and Culture, Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe (williamzivenge@yahoo.com)*,

Gift Mheta, *Department of Linguistics, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa (giftmheta@yahoo.com)*
and
Maxwell Kadenge, *Department of Linguistics, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa (maxwell.kadenge@wits.ac.za)*

Abstract: In this article, the phenomenon of Shona language change, its effects on lexicography and the need for a revised alphabet are discussed. Because of the defective Shona alphabet, lexicographers at the African Languages Research Institute (ALRI) encountered problems in handling some words that were potential headwords in dictionaries they were compiling under the ALLEX project. The current Shona alphabet is unable to realize quite a number of sounds and morphemes in lexical items in everyday use by the native Shona speakers, because they are alien loanwords. The article was prompted by the challenges encountered during the compilation of *Duramazwi reMimhanzi* (Shona Musical Terms Dictionary). It shows how language change accounts for the problem of headword selection and how modifying the current alphabet can enhance monolingual Shona lexicographical work vis-à-vis the development of the Shona language. It therefore stresses the need for a revised alphabet so as to solve orthographical problems during dictionary compilation.

Keywords: LANGUAGE CHANGE, ALLEX, LEXICON, SEGMENT, SUPRASEGMENT, ALPHABET, LEXICOGRAPHY, ASSIMILATION, BORROWING, ADOPTION, ARTICULATION, SOUNDS

Pfupiso Yechinyorwa: Matambudziko Anosanganwa Nawo Mukugadzira Maduramazwi eMutauro Mumwe chete neKuda Kwekushanduka Kwemutauro weChiShona: Panofanirwa Kuva neManyorerwo eChiShona Matsva.
Muchinyorwa chino vanyori vanoongorora kushanduka kuri kuita mutauro weChiShona nekufamba kuri kuita nguva nematambudziko anosanganikwa nawo nekuda kweshanduko iyi zvikurusei mukugadzira maduramazwi ari mururimi rweChiShona chete. Vanyori vanoonesawo pfungwa yekuti panodiwa manyorerwo matsva. Nyanzvi dzinogadzira maduramazwi paAfrican Languages Research Institute (ALRI) dzinosangana namadambudziko esarudzo yamazwi padzinenge dzichisarudza mazwi adzinenge dzichida kuisa mumaduramazwi adzinogadzira pachi-

rongwa chokugadzira maduramazwi chinonzi ALLEX. Dambudziko resarudzo yemazwi rinowanikwa nekuda kwechimiro chebumbiro remanyorerwo eChiShona risingatenderi mamwe mavara ari mune imwe mitauro asiri muChiShona. Bumbiro iri parizvino haritenderi mamwe mavara, mibatanidzwa yamavara namamwe mazwi anowanikwa mumutauro wemazuva ano waVaShona anobva mune mimwe mitauro. Chinyorwa chino chakatokonywa namadambudziko akasanganiwa nawo nevanyori vebepa rino pavakange vachigadzira *Duramazwi reMimhanzi.* Chinyorwa chino chakanangana nokuburitsa kushanduka kuri kuita ChiShona, uye matambudziko anosanganwa nawo pakusarudza mazwi anopinda muduramazwi uye kuonesa zvakare kuti kugadzirisa bumbiro ramanyorerwo kunogona kurerutsa basa ravagadziri vamaduramazwi. Izvi zvinoita zvakare kuti mutauro weChiShona uvandutswe. Pamusoro pezvose izvi, chinyorwa chino chinoda kutaridza kuti sei zvakakosha kuita chimbichimbi kugadzirisa chimiro chebumbiro remanyorerwe pakuzama kurerusa matambudziko anosanganwa nawo nevagadziri vemaduramazwi eChiShona.

Mazwi Akakosha: KUSANDUKA KWEMUTAURO, ALLEX, MAZWI, SEGIMENDI, SUPURASEGIMENDI, ARIFABETI, ZVAMADURAMAZWI, ADHAPUTESHENI, KUKWERETA, ADHOPUSHENI, ATIKURESHENI, MITINHIRO

Introduction

Linguists, especially Ferdinand de Saussure (Atchison 2001: 18), have shown that change is inevitable in any language. Languages change through various ways, the commonest being adopting and assimilating segmental and supra-segmental features from languages with which they are in contact. Through this contact, languages constantly interact as they communicate objects within their linguistic environments. Speakers of such languages mingle and may exchange linguistic items, which ultimately interferes with their mother tongues, thereby altering them. They may part with some of their linguistic aspects and acquire new ones, adding them to their inventories. Some languages signify objects that are peculiar to themselves but, because of constant interaction with other languages, natural transfer occurs as speakers mingle, resulting in what Chimhundu (2002) refers to as adoption. This means that change is, among other reasons, the result of borrowing linguistic features from one language into another to fill in communication gaps in the receiving language. Usually languages borrow segments from foreign languages with which they are in contact and/or from other indigenous languages or dialects. Contact with these other languages necessitates cross-linguistic influence as a result of political, cultural, social and economic developments in the world. Bynon (1977) describes language contact as the existence of more than one language in a particular locality. Shona is directly in contact with English as a foreign language, which came into Zimbabwe owing to colonization, but Shona also mingles with distant foreign languages via other indigenous languages. Shona, comprising Karanga, Manyika, Zezuru, Korekore and Ndau dialects, is one of the two widely spoken languages in Zimbabwe. It is spoken by people who

mostly live in the eastern half of Zimbabwe, adjacent to Mozambique. It is in contact with English, Ndebele and a wide range of community languages.

Apart from English, Shona is also in contact with fourteen other indigenous languages that have segments different from those of Shona. Some of the popular ones are Shangani, Ndebele, Nambya, Tsonga/Tonga and Venda. It is from some of these languages that Shona obtains some of its lexical items to add to its lexical inventory. In other words, it receives additional linguistic features from outside and from within its traditional domain. In this process of borrowing, from outside its main domain, there is a high chance that it will incorporate alien segments and suprasegments into its inventory. Cultural intimacy and dialect borrowing for the past decades have resulted in new segments and suprasegments in Shona. Some of the dialects of Shona such as Ndau, Manyika and Korekore are in border areas. These border areas are points of ethnolinguistic enclave. Speakers of these dialects are living in contact with speakers of other languages found in Mozambique. Because of this the Manyika and Ndau people become bilingual, speaking their neighbours' languages. Such ethnic interaction results in the exchange of linguistic features, which results in Shona receiving other sounds from outside its domain.

Invasion and the subsequent colonization by the British in the 1890s were followed by periods of linguistic contact between English and Shona. This was conducive to the diffusion of lexical items between the two languages to such an extent that most Shona speakers have become bilingual. The fact that English was then elevated to an official language, used in educational and formal sectors, gave it a prestigious status. This became a conditional motivating factor to acquire English as a way of asserting affiliation with a prestigious language. This linguistic legacy, even into the present day, coerces Shona speakers to be associated with English, which entails speaking it or borrowing from it. Education also as a social factor has actually prepared Shona speakers to acquire English for it has been made the medium of instruction in schools, colleges and universities. This means that all those who have passed through formal education to any level, have acquired English to some degree. This means that three-quarters of Shona-speaking youth have gone through formal tutelage where English has been used.

Migration to and from Zimbabwe by the Shona and speakers of other languages for economic, political and social reasons, which increased after independence in 1980, has created complex linguistic contact between Shona and other languages, causing an extensive transfer of linguistic elements. The spread of international languages has also been greatly made possible and influenced by the electronic media, in particular computer, video and audio technologies. In this situation linguistic segments are being transferred from one language to the other, Shona being no exception.

In this process languages gain or lose particular linguistic and extralinguistic attributes and so does Shona. In situations where a language is in constant change, especially where new sounds, morphemes, lexical items and

suprasegmental features are adopted from other languages which do not share similar features, lexicographers face serious problems in handling headwords with such characteristics. As established in this article, a wide range of changes occur in Shona because of its contact with English and other African languages, which ultimately results in Shona adopting some characteristics of these languages and then adapting them to or assimilating them in Shona.

Patterns of change

Shona is developing through the borrowing of lexical items to fill in gaps realized in communication. This ultimately results in sound and phonological changes. Other changes are realized at the suprasegmental level. At the segmental level, change is mediated by phonetic processes so as to ease articulation. A language borrows because of a lack or need realized by gaps in communication, which are referred to as lexical gaps. Shona disseminates (sounds and morphemes) to and borrows (sounds and lexical items) from other languages, thereby losing some of its properties and gaining others, which Chimhundu (2002) refers to as transfer of elements.

These new sounds that do not correspond with the current orthography then pose problems to lexicographical work, particularly treating them as entries in dictionaries. It is within the framework of this article to look at Shona language change at the level of sound and above. In most cases when words are borrowed from another language which do not share similar sounds with the receiving one, assimilation takes place to accommodate those words with alien sounds in the new phonological environment. In most of the sounds complete assimilation is achieved, especially where there is direct correspondence between sounds of the loaner language and Shona. Usually the phonological conventions available in Shona will accommodate them as shown, for instance, by the following correspondences:

English	Shona	Word in Shona with English gloss	
m	m	*mita* (meter)	m > m
t	t	*mita* (meter)	t > t
s	s	*sofa* (sofa)	s > s
c	k	*kapu* (cup)	k > k
p	p	*kapu* (cup)	p > p

Such circumstances do not effectuate any graphological changes, the concept (signified) is adopted but the sounds are nativised or lexicalized through phonological assimilation. The ultimate result of this rephonologization process is what is termed complete assimilation. Loanwords such as *mita* (meter), *sofa* (sofa) and *kapu* (cup) can be accommodated by the Shona orthography and they do not register any graphological changes.

There are situations where there are no direct equivalents or where there are no sounds near to the Shona ones. In complex situations where there are no direct correspondences, alien sounds from the loaner language are adopted as they are into the Shona language as shown below.

English	Shona
theory	*thiyori*
thermometer	*themomita* or *themometa*
thousand	*thausendi*

The postulated changes in these loanwords from English are that the voiceless inter-dental fricative [θ] has been incorporated into Shona in the borrowing process. This is what may be referred to as partial assimilation. What this implies is that there is a blend of sounds found in the loaner language and receiving language, for instance, in the word *thiyori* (theory), the word-initial [θ] is English whilst *yori* is Shona. Other examples of English consonant sounds that have been assimilated in Shona but are not represented in Shona orthography are the English lateral approximant [l] and the breathy voiced alveolar trill [r̤] as shown in the words below.

English	Shona
lotion	*losheni*
loaf	*lofu*
lecture	*lekicha*
library	*laibhurari*
lorry	*rhori*
ruler	*rhula*

The problem that compilers of dictionaries face is whether to include such words in the Shona dictionary or not. What has been explained so far is consonant assimilation in the process of nativisation or what Chimhundu (2002) refers to as adaptation. This shows that consonant assimilation may be partial, resulting in the incorporation of new sounds and a segmental change.

The above discussion has therefore brought the realization that Shona has new sounds for which there is no provision in Shona orthography, for Shona has only the following sounds, from which various acceptable combinations are derived:

<a, b, bh, c, ch, d, dh, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, m, mh, n, nh, ng, ny, n', o, p, r, s, sh, sv, t, u, v, vh, w, y, z, zh, zv>

The monolingual lexicographer's postulated challenges

A monolingual Shona lexicographer is envisaged to face a major challenge of headword selection in so far as orthographic plausibility is concerned. The se-

lection of some headwords having new sounds adopted from other languages was problematic in *Duramazwi Guru ReChiShona* (DGC) and especially in *Duramazwi ReMimhanzi* (SMTD). These are words like *thiyori* (theory), *thiyeta* (theatre), *loni* (lawn), *rhori* (lorry), *themometa* (thermometer), *rheza* (razor) and *lita* (litre).

All these words which exist in the Shona corpus, are widely used by Shona speakers. As they were borrowed from English, their spellings are not recognized in Shona. The challenge is whether to include or exclude them from the dictionary. Excluding them would imply that they are not commonly used, which is untrue as evidenced by their existence in the corpus. Including them bring with it the problem of presentation, that is, whether to represent their spoken form with the letters and letter combinations permissible in the Shona alphabet or to follow the orthography but misrepresent the spoken form. The dilemma of the lexicographer is whether or not to treat them as headwords in monolingual Shona lexicography, with the purist users of both DGC and SMTD strongly feeling that their language can be corrupted by entering English-spelt words not fully realized through Shona orthography.

There are also other words from different dialects of Shona that present a similar problem to monolingual Shona lexicographers. Magwa (2002) says:

> From 1967 onwards, speakers of different dialects were experiencing certain difficulties arising from the defective alphabet and the spelling and word division system. The current orthography is linguistically constricting in a number of ways. For example, the standard alphabet does not have symbols representing the sounds <l> and <x>, which are found in ChiKaranga, ChiNdau and Chi-Korekore dialects.

What can be deduced from this discussion is that some words borrowed from English, Nguni and Xhosa cannot be realized by the Shona. Examples of such words are:

Word	Dialect in which it is used	English gloss	Problem letters/letter combinations
muhlobo	Karanga/Ndau	way of doing	-hl-, -b-
pxere	Karanga	kids	-x-, -px-
xumbudzi	Karanga/Ndau	lean goat	-hx-
muhlaba	Ndau	jocular/naughty	-l-, -hl-
maxeu	Karanga	maheu	-x-
xarani	Karanga	thread	x-
muxoro	Karanga	wage/salary	-x-
kudla	Karanga	eat	-dl-
ntunzvi	Ndau	fly	nt-
khamba	Ndau	leopard	kh-
nquzu	Ndau	type of dance	-q-, nq-

These words exist in the Shona corpus, some of them appearing quite frequently, but were not treated as headwords in DGC, owing to the fact that the current orthography does not recognize them. However, some of these words, both from English and other African languages, were treated as headwords but have changed spellings as shown below:

pxere > pwere (kids)
uxwa > uswa (thatching grass)
muhlobo > mutovo (way of doing)
muxoro > muhoro (salary)
lita > *lita (litre drink)
themometa > *themometa

The asterisk shows that there is a violation of the orthography, whilst all the other examples without an asterisk are a misrepresentation of the spoken forms. Language change has brought with it challenges to monolingual lexicographers at the African Languages Research Institute (ALRI).

The challenges that lexicographers are facing need an urgent revision of the Shona alphabet so that it becomes flexible to accommodate all patterns of language change. Accommodating change is feasible only when the alphabet allows a diversity of sounds and sound combinations. No language can develop if change is resisted or remains unrecognized.

Conclusion

The discussion has undertaken to show how Shona is developing by adopting lexical items from other languages with which it is in contact. This results in the incorporation of some sounds alien to Shona. These are basically those sounds that cannot be realized by the current Shona alphabet. The article has indicated the problems of headword selection arising as a result of the inadequacies of the current orthography. The article concentrates only on problems emanating from English loanwords and those borrowed from other African languages. The emphasis of this article has been to analyze how headword selection has become problematic by different word categories as a result of Shona language change. This is an important aspect to consider for monolingual lexicography because technical evolution of the twenty-first century, with the advent of globalization, is causing both linguistic and orthographic evolution, a shift that is evidenced by the inadequacies of the Shona orthography. What is important, however, is that monolingual lexicographers, together with both speakers and planners of the language, should constantly revise and broaden the alphabet and orthography of their language, to cater for language development. This will help to overcome the problem of the inadequacies of the orthography.

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